

# **America's Collision Course with the Caucasus: Is Military Intervention Inevitable?**

**A Monograph  
by  
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The Caucasus is developing into a vital strategic region. It emerged from the Soviet Union's shadow in 1991 and spawned wild oil and gas speculation, and U.S. policy makers developed relationships with the region's countries as it matured. However, ethnic tensions and separatist movements in the Caucasus still pose a significant threat to American interests. Will the U.S. military intervene to stabilize the Caucasus by 2010? This monograph explores this question. It introduces the reader to the Caucasus' complexity and presents factors affecting a military intervention decision. It presents three likely contingencies that may require U.S. force intervention before 2010: peacekeeping in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, stabilization of the Georgian or Azerbaijani governments, or prevention of ethnic cleansing. It also provides a summary of each contingency compared to the 1999 National Security Strategy's criteria for deploying U.S. forces to assess the probability of intervention. The monograph is a passport to the Caucasus, removing the mystery from it to assess its operational challenges. The key to success in future military operations there is understanding the Caucasus' diversity and its emerging international significance.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **AMERICA'S COLLISION COURSE WITH THE CAUCASUS: IS MILITARY INTERVENTION INEVITABLE?**

by MAJ Christopher H. Beckert, U.S. Army, 57 pages.

The Caucasus is developing into a vital strategic region. It emerged from the Soviet Union's shadow in 1991 and spawned wild oil and gas speculation, and U.S. policy makers developed relationships with the region's countries as it matured. However, ethnic tensions and separatist movements in the Caucasus still pose a significant threat to American interests. Will the U.S. military intervene to stabilize the Caucasus by 2010? This monograph explores this question. It introduces the reader to the Caucasus' complexity and presents factors affecting a military intervention decision. It presents three likely contingencies that may require U.S. force intervention before 2010: peacekeeping in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, stabilization of the Georgian or Azerbaijani governments, or prevention of ethnic cleansing. It also provides a summary of each contingency compared to the 1999 National Security Strategy's criteria for deploying U.S. forces to assess the probability of intervention. The monograph is a passport to the Caucasus, removing the mystery from it to assess its operational challenges. The key to success in future military operations there is understanding the Caucasus' diversity and its emerging international significance.

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## **II. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This work is a culmination of two years of interest in the Caspian region. My interest began in 1999 with Mr. Robert Cullen's article, "The Caspian Sea", in National Geographic, and was fueled by a curiosity about the fascinating array of factors at work there. I thank Les Grau for keeping my curiosity for the region focused and intellectual. Les and the analysts at the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO), Fort Leavenworth, are vital to the Army's assessment of regional threats and foreign militaries. I am in their debt for their assistance and patience.

### **III. INTRODUCTION: AMERICA'S APPROACHING DECISION POINT ON INTERVENTION IN THE CAUCASUS**

*"After Kosovo, the West will not intervene east of the Carpathians. Kosovo was a difficult and lucky victory for NATO, so we in the Caucasus know that we are alone against the Kremlin."—Alexander Rondeli, a Georgian intellectual.<sup>1</sup>*

Deciding on military intervention is not easy. Americans trust their national leaders with the decision. There are tremendous risks to weigh. There are timelines to consider. There are complexities to unravel. When the national leadership decides, the decision grabs headlines, earns time in special reports, and causes endless public debate. This study is a work of predictive analysis. It seeks to analyze the information available to support one such decision *before* the need arises. The decision in question is whether U.S. military intervention in the Caucasus is inevitable.

#### **THE EROSION OF AMERICA'S CASPIAN POSITION**

America's collision course with the Caucasus began in 1991 with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and it is racing toward conclusion in the coming decade. American engagement in the region is faltering despite a promising start in the early 1990's. Oil and gas speculators roared into the region, infusing the local economies with large amounts of cash. In September 1994, a consortium of ten Western oil companies, led by British Petroleum (BP) and Amoco, committed \$8 billion dollars to develop three offshore oilfields near Baku.<sup>2</sup> Mercedes Benz's automobiles began to cruise along Baku streets, passing refugees from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Dizzying estimates about the Caspian reserves predicted finds to rival those of the North Sea. Petroleum experts estimated that the Caspian region reserves were the third largest in the world

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<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *Eastward to Tartary*, (New York: Random House, 2000), pg. 246-7. Emphasis by underline added by author.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Klebnikov, "The Quietly Determined American", *Forbes*, 10, Vol. 154, pp. 48.

behind Siberia and the Persian Gulf.<sup>3</sup> “Oilman’s Boulevard” in Baku became a showplace of opulence and petrodollars. The possibilities for the Caspian’s oil and natural gas fortunes that are locked away under the placid waters were dazzling. That was the era of promise in the early 1990’s.

The Caspian’s bright future is now dimming. Speculations are now wavering despite the promise of abundant reserves. The tenuous peace within the region is beginning to fail. Ten regional conflicts simmer unresolved. Russia and Iran, the two regional hegemon, are beginning to reassert influence in the region to regain control. Amidst these fissures in stability, the United States stands at a crossroads of decisive action and isolationism. The promise of a greater U.S. role in the Caucasus region lies unfulfilled. When the Presidential administrations changed in January of 2001, the fate of the Caucasus changed with them. America remains the sole Western country in the world with the ability to act decisively and foster multilateral cooperation with other Western nations in the Caucasus. The many threats to the region’s stability can be overcome by U.S. national “instruments of power” if the President decided to intervene.

Ten years after the Soviet Union collapse, several factors threaten America’s position in the Caucasus. The first of these is the resurgence of regional Russian hegemony. The election of President Vladimir Putin, the threat to Russian commerce by Western investment in the Caucasus, and Russian concern about fundamentalist Islamic insurgencies have catalyzed the Russian government into action. In January 2001, President Putin toured Baku for the first time since taking office, and Caspian security strategy has evolved into a top Russian priority. On 21 April 2000, President Putin appointed a special presidential advisor for Caspian affairs to closely monitor the region.<sup>4</sup> Russian officials have reassessed their Caucasian and Caspian interests and

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<sup>3</sup> Lester W. Grau, “Hydrocarbons and the Re-emergence of a Strategic Region: The Caspian Sea and Central Asia.” Originally published as “La Política del Oleoducto y el Surgimiento de una Nueva Region Estrategica: Petroleo y Gas Natural del Mar Caspioy Asia Central” *Military Review*, March-April 1998 Spanish-language ed., pp. 73-81.

<sup>4</sup> Carol Saivetz, “Putin’s Caspian Policy”, *Caspian Studies Program Policy Brief*, No. 1, JFK School of Government, Caspian Studies Program, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press, Oct 2000), pg. 1.



increased their efforts to remain influential in the region. Russian “neo-imperialism” is beginning to challenge “pax-Americana”<sup>5</sup>. Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia—Russia’s traditional “buffer zone” with Iran—drifted into Western orbit while Russia addressed domestic crises.<sup>6</sup> The war with Chechnya and resurgence of Muslim fundamentalism has triggered Russian concern about losing the safety of the Transcaucasus buffer zone and generating security concerns along the border. More and more Russian elites are voicing concern about the presence of the U.S. on their southern border, including Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and former Defense Minister General Igor Sergeyev, who warned the U. S. may force Russia out of the region altogether.<sup>7</sup> Russia enjoys two clear advantages over the U.S in the region—location and a shared past. Three major Russian military bases are located in Georgia, and as recently as December 2000, the Russian government continued to delay their closure and withdrawal from Georgian soil. This gives them the advantage of time and location over U.S. forces that must deploy long distances with extended lines of communication.<sup>8</sup> The Russians also enjoy historic, imperial ties to the region. Stalin was a Georgian. The old Soviet machinery, both political and military, still exists in different form throughout the region. Signs still bear the Cyrillic alphabet, and Russian can still be heard everywhere. Russia’s renewed efforts to reassert its influence in the Caucasus are beginning to show results, and the likelihood of a new Cold War, centered in the Caucasus, is

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<sup>5</sup> “Neo-imperialism” is described as the Russia’s current strategies to reassert its regional hegemony in the Caucasus and in other regions. It is primarily focuses on retaining access to economic resources in the Caucasus. See Richard Sokolsky and Tanya Charlick-Paley, *NATO and Caspian Security: A Mission Too Far?*, (Santa Monica: RAND, 1999), pg. 25.

<sup>6</sup> See Rajan Menon. “In the Shadow of the Bear: Security in Post-Soviet Central Asia,” *International Security*, 1, Vol 20, Summer 1995, pp. 149-181, for an excellent assessment of how nervous the Soviet security establishment has become with regards to their Caucasian border.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen J. Blank, *U.S. Military Engagement with Transcaucasia and Central Asia*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, Jun 2000), pg. 10.

<sup>8</sup> “Georgia Under Worst Pressure Since Independence”, *Georgia Update*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 10 Jan 01, pg. 3.

developing. America's position in the region will become untenable if Russia is successfully able reassert itself.



Figure 1. A Patchwork of Conflict.<sup>9</sup>

The regions' numerous unresolved conflicts also threaten the U.S. position in the Caucasus. As of January 2001, the Caucasus hosts ten unresolved regional conflicts (See Figure 1) ranging from separatist republics to criminal fiefdoms. Regional ethnic cleansing and refugee displacement dwarf the Kosovar Albanian problem in the Balkans. One in seven Azerbaijanis is a refugee--the highest per capita percentage of any country in the world<sup>10</sup>. Oil companies constantly fear pipeline interdiction. Refugees from the Chechan conflict flood through the Pankisi Gorge in northeastern Georgia at an alarming rate. A mafia warlord, Aslan Abashidze, controls the main Georgian port of Batumi, regulating the local customs traffic with bribery and corruption. His followers in the breakaway republic of Adjara have nicknamed his territory "Aslanistan".<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> "The Caucasus: Where Worlds Collide," *The Economist*, 24 Aug 2000, pg. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Michael H. Gavshon, producer. "Baku", as shown on CBS News, *60 Minutes*. (Livingston, NJ: Burrelle's Information Services, 24 Sep 00), pg. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Kaplan, pg. 221.

Efforts to resolve the conflicts are negligible. The United Nations maintains a very small peacekeeping presence in the region, in Georgia's breakaway Abkhazian republic. The Organization of Security Cooperation for Europe (OSCE) is brokering a peace in Azerbaijan and Armenia's Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but the Armenian-held enclave still generates unrest. Russian forces exert pressure on Georgia to interdict supplies for the Chechen Rebels Pankisi Gorge. The sheer number of conflicts in the Caucasus challenges U.S. diplomatic and economic interests with an uncertain future.

The emergence of new national, international, and non-national influences is also threatening the American Caucasus position. Nationalism has generated the preponderance of the Caucasus' current conflicts. As the region spun away from post-Soviet Russia, nationalism was a constructive force that fostered independence in the region's countries. However, as ethnic enclaves within the region begin to seek self-determination, nationalism became destructive to sovereignty in the region. Georgia contains four republics seeking autonomy. The countries of the Caucasus are unable to counter the secessionist demands with credible force or diplomatic pressure. Many of the break-away republics are supported by more powerful international sponsors, the second most divisive factor in the Caucasus. China, Russia, and Iran have assiduously exerted themselves economically and diplomatically to counter Western in roads. Turkey struggles as the lone NATO ally in the region, supporting only Azerbaijan economically and militarily.<sup>12</sup> The Caucasus' fledgling governments are vulnerable to the influence of more powerful allies. The lack of steady cash flows and turbulent domestic situations create an environment of need that regional neighbors can exploit. This also creates opportunities for Western nations to act decisively in support of the Caucasian states, countering these hegemonic pressures. The third emerging influence are from non-national actors. Fundamentalist

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<sup>12</sup> Suha Bolukbasi, "Ankara's Baku-Centered Transcaucasia Policy: Has it Failed?", *The Middle East Journal*, 1, Vol. 51, Winter 1997, pg. 5.

Islam is one of the surging non-national influences, enjoying a rebirth regionally. For example, Islamic tensions feed the ongoing Russo-Chechen War and reach into the Caucasus. Another example is how Iran tries to export an aggressive form of Shia Islam to Azerbaijan. Saudi Arabia does the same with Sunni Wahabbism. Local leaders in Azerbaijan have cautiously re-embraced Islam to prevent fundamentalist forces from gaining power. The presence of oil money is generating a more moderate religious stance by Iran, since Iran fears that Azerbaijan's more moderate Islam will encourage separatism in the nation's large Azeri population around Tabriz.<sup>13</sup> The combination of non-national actors like Islam, nationalism, and international influences threaten U.S. regional interests, and challenge local stability

## SEEKING STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS FOR THE CASPIAN

America's declining position in the Caucasus creates a dilemma for the U.S. military. As one of the four instruments of national power that the National Command Authority (NCA) has to shape national security policy, the military must consider the probability of its commitment in the region. Diplomacy and economics may fail to advance national security goals in Caucasus without some form of military intervention. America's national security policy of *engagement* provides for the use of military force to "influence the actions of other states and non-state actors, to provide global leadership, and to remain a reliable security partner for the community of nations that share our interests."<sup>14</sup> Of the four instruments of national power—diplomacy, information, military, and economics--the military is the most direct and sometimes most controversial of the group, but a decision concerning the U.S. military's role in the Caucasus is approaching. The criteria that the NCA must apply in this decision is provided in The National Security Strategy under "The Decision to Employ Military Forces."<sup>15</sup> The decision to employ

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Cullen, "The Caspian Sea", *National Geographic*, #5, Vol 195, May 1999, pp. 28-29.

<sup>14</sup> William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, (Washington, DC: The White House Printing Office, Dec 1999), pg. 3. Hereafter cited as "NSS, 1999"

<sup>15</sup> NSS, 1999, pp. 19-20.

forces will be driven by U.S. national interests—either vital, important national, or humanitarian.

The application of military force must be weighed by the following assessments:

1. Have we explored or exhausted non-military means that offer a reasonable chance of achieving our goals?
2. Is there a clearly defined, achievable mission?
3. What is the threat environment and what risks will our forces face?
4. What level of effort will be needed to achieve our goals?
5. What are the potential costs—human or financial—of the operation?
6. What are the opportunity costs in terms of maintaining our capability to respond to higher-priority contingencies?
7. Do we have milestones and a desired end state to guide a decision on terminating the mission?<sup>16</sup>

These criteria guide the NCA's decision for executing a military intervention. They provide a test of feasibility, suitability, and acceptability (FAS) for the available courses of action. As America examines its position and interests in the Caucasus, the military must examine the possibility of increasing its role in the region.

Strategic solutions for the Caucasus are difficult. The U.S. could act in many different ways, either alone or with allies. Several options are available. If the U.S. acts unilaterally, there will be a tremendous burden of resources and sole responsibility. This course of action would provide a simple command structure, but most likely generate heavy international criticism. Acting bilaterally or multilaterally could tremendously ease the burden of intervention and create media approval. The U.S. has several Western allies in the Caucasus area through combined economic interests. The United Kingdom's British Petroleum (BP) is a partner with America's Amoco in the Azerbaijani International Oil Consortium (AIOC). Turkey is a NATO ally with strong ties to the region, especially to Azerbaijan. Turkey currently maintains a strong position in the balance of power among the Caucasian nations. Nations of the OSCE could also join the U.S. in supporting an intervention. The U.S. has pledged to support the Minsk Peace Process, chaired

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<sup>16</sup> NSS, 1999, pg. 20.

by the OSCE, which is charged with negotiating a peace treaty for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. If Azerbaijan and Armenia sign a treaty, the real test for America could be commitment of forces as peacekeepers.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the U.S. could act as a member nation in an internationally-decreed intervention, such as a UN peacekeeping operation or NATO peacekeeping operation. Whether unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral, actions taken by U.S. must be decisive to prevent the loss of popular support for the intervention.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FOCUS**

The Caucasus is a harsh landscape nestled between two of the world's most dangerous nations. It is as unfamiliar to Americans now as the Balkans were some six years ago. However, with the looming threats to its regional security, the Caucasus may require U.S. military intervention to ensure its stability. This study examines the probability of that intervention and then considers how strategically important the Caucasus region may become to the U.S. To accomplish this aim, the first section will examine the complexity of the Caucasus region develop an understanding of the difficulties facing American forces deploying there. The study then turns to the National Security Strategy to assess which ongoing regional conflicts and future scenarios are likely to pull American forces into the region. It uses the "Criteria to Employ Military Forces"<sup>18</sup> to evaluate each scenario on its likelihood to lead to intervention and for what purposes. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the findings and suggests future research topics.

The probability of U.S. military operations in the Caucasus region is looming larger. The stability of the region is undergoing tremendous stress. Many hard-line, Soviet-era politicians are losing influence and power to the younger, reform-minded technocrats. The further collision of

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<sup>17</sup> "Bush Seeks to Help End Warfare in Oil-Rich Caspian", *Azerbaijan International Magazine*, [azer.com/aiweb/categories/karabakh](http://azer.com/aiweb/categories/karabakh), 29 Apr 01.

<sup>18</sup> NSS, pg. 20.

modern ideas with ancient cultures may threaten U.S interests. The Caucasus promises to be a dilemma for the U.S. in the next decade.

#### **IV. SECTION ONE: THE WORLD'S COMPLEX LITTLE CORNER**

*...the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stumbling-stone and a rock to trip over. They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.—The Bible, 1 Peter 2: 8-10<sup>19</sup>*

*In Persian there is a word, darya, which translates as sea but also means something that is complex and multifaceted. The Caspian is, in both senses of the word, darya.—Reza, Iranian-born photographer for National Geographic<sup>20</sup>*

#### **THE CAUCASUS—LAND BRIDGE BETWEEN TROUBLED WATERS**



Figure 2. The Caucasus—Land Bridge Between Troubled Waters.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *The Bible*, (New York: The American Bible Association, 1914), pg. 282.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Cullen, "The Caspian Sea", National Geographic, 5, Vol. 195, May 1999, pg. 141.

<sup>21</sup> Map provided by CaucasusWatch.Com, an independent, open-source intelligence service on the internet.  
<<http://www.Caucasuswatch.com>>

The Caucasus is a mystery to most Americans. The land between the Caspian and Black Seas rarely makes television or headline news in American homes. Very few media celebrities claim the Caucasus as their home. Yet, the region witnessed the world's first major oil bonanza before World War I and before the Middle East's oil strikes. Through the centuries, it has witnessed countless caravans and travelers along East-West routes across Asia. The tribes and peoples of the Caucasus trace lineages back to the earliest records of civilization. The ancient Greek myth of Prometheus asserts that he was bound to "Mount Caucasus" in Georgia<sup>22</sup>. Over one hundred nationalities comprise the area, speaking dozens of dialects. The Caucasus is as obscure to Americans now as the Balkans was just six years ago, but that may change in the coming decade.

## **PASSPORT TO THE CAUCASUS**

### *GEOGRAPHY*

The Caucasus Region, also known as the "Transcaucasus", is an area roughly half the size of the former Yugoslavia. The region's most dominant feature, the Caucasus Mountains, extend nine hundred miles across the entire area, defining the boundaries between ethnicities, nations, and cultures. The southcentral Asian region serves as the land bridge between the Black and Caspian Seas, and supports north to south trade routes between the Middle East and Russia. The region's population totals 15 million and the average per capita salary of the region's three countries of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia is \$2,000 a year, with Armenia at the high end of the scale.<sup>23</sup> Turkey, Russia, and Iran are the region's neighbors, sharing more than three thousand kilometers of international borders with Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—of which only nine kilometers are peaceful between Azerbaijan's Nakhichevan province and Turkey. The Caucasus

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<sup>22</sup> Kaplan, pg. 228.

<sup>23</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Country Studies*, Area Handbook Series, DA PAM 550-111, (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Mar 1994), pp. xxiv. Hereafter referenced as "DA PAM 550-111"



poses daunting obstacles to movement from CONUS and forward-deployed U.S. military bases, the closest of which is Incirlik Air Force Base in Turkey. Bases in CONUS are over six thousand miles from the western shores of Georgia, and bases in Germany are over nineteen hundred miles.<sup>24</sup> The treacherous line of communication from Georgia's Black Sea ports to Baku stretch some seven hundred and fifty miles over the Caucasus Mountains —on a two-lane underdeveloped roadway which is mostly gravel. More promising lines of communication lie in Iran and Russia. The routes from Astrakhan in Russia and the Persian Gulf ports of Iran are more direct and modern. Diplomatic tensions between the U.S., Iran, and Russia prohibit the use of these lines. However, the U.S. should consider this as a disadvantage. Agreements and coalition operations could open more lines of communication into the Caucasus via Russia and Iran and greatly enable a major deployment operation. Otherwise, the inaccessibility of the Caucasus hampers and constrains military operations resigned to using the Georgian land route only.

## *HISTORY*

The tumultuous history of the Caucasus is shaped by its geography and location. The region's recorded history date back to the beginning of modern civilization, when the Greeks colonized the western shores of Georgia. The Caucasus' location at juncture of southeastern Europe and the western border of Asia has profoundly influenced its history.

In pre-Christian times, while Georgia was being colonized by Greece, tribes from southeastern Europe settled Armenia. Asiatic Medes, Persians, and Scythians established Azerbaijan and Persian culture dominated the formative period during the first millennium B.C.<sup>25</sup> Language and religion have long divided the Transcaucasus. In the early fourth century, Armenian and Georgian kings accepted Christianity and both still practice one of the oldest forms of the religion in the world. Georgia has been a battleground of East-West religion since that

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<sup>24</sup> Transport Corridor Europe, Caucasus, and Asia, a European Commission (EU) website, [www.tracea.org](http://www.tracea.org).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pg. xxi.

period, particularly between Rome and the Persians. This generated an interesting phenomenon in Georgia, where the religion is uniquely western but the culture is influenced by the East and ancient Persia.<sup>26</sup> Georgia remains a tribal- and clan-based society that is especially evident in its many separatist movements. Divergence continues to plague Georgia. The one official alphabet in Georgia is one of the oldest among the world's fourteen contemporary alphabets.<sup>27</sup> But, there are three official Georgian languages: Georgian, Mingrelian, and Svan.<sup>28</sup> Four unofficial languages remain in Georgia as vestiges of early invasions: Turkic, Armenian, Ossetian, and Abkhaz. Armenian Christianity split from Byzantine Orthodoxy despite the influence of Greek culture during its occupation of Armenia. In Azerbaijan, Islam supplanted the Zoroastrian religion—an ancient Persian sect with many adherents in modern-day India—in the seventh century.<sup>29</sup> Later conquest by the Turks influenced Azerbaijani culture and Turkey remains Azerbaijan's closest cultural ally.<sup>30</sup> Shiite Islam is the prevalent religion in Azerbaijan, making it the second largest country in the world where Shia Islam dominates the culture (behind Iran). The turbulent history of the region continued from the twelfth through twentieth centuries as the Ottomans, Persians, and Russians invaded, occupied, and transformed the cultures of Transcaucasia with their passing.

The Russian rule of the Caucasus had a most profound impact on the region. Beginning in the early eighteenth century, the Russians constantly probed the Caucasus for possible expansion toward the Caspian and Black Seas. These efforts involved Russia in a series of wars with the decaying Persian and Ottoman empires. By 1828, Russian efforts were rewarded with a treaty annexing all of present-day Azerbaijan and Georgia and most of contemporary Armenia. Russian occupation and subjugation of the Caucasian people had begun, and would last until

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<sup>26</sup> Kaplan, pg. 229.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> DA PAM 550-111, pg. xxiv.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pg. xxv.

1991, some 163 years.<sup>31</sup> The Caucasus enjoyed only a brief period of independence, when the Tsar was overthrown in 1918.<sup>32</sup> The Federal Republic of Transcaucasia emerged on 22 April 1918 and lasted a month before the three member nations claimed their own independence. Subsequently, the Red Army attacked them and by 1921, Russia had brought back each country of Transcaucasia under Russian control. Independence for Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia would not occur again until the fall of Soviet Russia in 1991.<sup>33</sup> As part of the Soviet Union, the Caucasus endured approximately the same degree of political and economic renovation as the other republics. The Sovietization of the region yielded productive economies, collectivization of agriculture, improved education, and beneficial social programs. In his recent travels among the people of the Caucasus, Robert Kaplan notes the yearning by regional citizens for the efficiency and security of Communist times. In one passage, he records the lament of Azerbaijani war heroes frustrated over dwindling pensions that were higher under Soviet rule<sup>34</sup>, and the confusion created in Tblisi when the Georgian government abolished Russia as the official language:

The Russians built up Tblisi in the nineteenth century as the capital of Transcaucasia...It was a golden age. We thought nationalism didn't exist. Then it destroyed us. The Jews left for Israel, the Armenians, for Armenia; the Russians, for Russia; and so on. And now we are losing our Russian language, which is a disaster for us...the loss of Russian cuts the average Georgian off from the outside world. All our books of learning, our encyclopedias on art, literature, history, science, are in Russian...There is a new illiteracy that is promoting ethnic separation.<sup>35</sup>

Within the Caucasus, chaos, fear, and isolationism crept in behind the retreating Russians. After the three Caucasian nations became independent in 1991, the crumbling Soviet-era systems began to falter. A schizophrenic combination of free-market capitalism and Soviet collective farming

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> David A. Twining, *The New Eurasia: A Guide to the Republics of the Former Soviet Union*, (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1993), 115.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Kaplan, pg. 262.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pg. 244.

appeared in Azerbaijan. Georgia and Armenia encouraged land distribution to independent farmers but retained state-controlled agricultural harvesting. The situation in post-Soviet Transcaucasia continues to deteriorate.

## **THE MODERN MAELSTROM OF THE CAUCASUS**

The modern maelstrom of regional conflict, emerging capitalism, and the eroding vestiges of communism combine to make the Caucasus a dangerous and uncertain place. The post-Soviet Caucasus has undergone many of the difficulties of independence that the other former Soviet republics have experienced. Unlike countries like Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and the Ukraine, the Caucasus does not border on Europe. Kaplan and others observe this phenomenon in their writings. A Georgian intellectual's offered his observations about the Caucasus' fate:

...we will never be able to rely on the United States or NATO.  
We are too far from Europe, too close to Russia. NATO will not  
bomb for weeks to save Georgians from ethnic cleansing in  
Abkhazia the way it bombed to save Albanians in Kosovo.<sup>36</sup>

The inevitability of this statement is tough to ignore. The Caucasus appears alone in its fate. What major factors complicate the West's involvement in the region?

### ***ETHNICITY***

Ethnicity plays a key role in the character of the Caucasus. It has caused wars, migrations, and massacres. Ethnicity defined the first steps taken towards independence by the Caucasian countries after the Soviet collapse. Ethnic groups, released from the restraints of Soviet ideology, sought to reunite with their homelands and their cultures. Armenia was the first Caucasian country to proclaim its independence on August 23, 1990. The Armenian diaspora supported their efforts from abroad, and it took them a full year before the Soviet Union

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, pg. 247.

disintegrated and they realized their dream. A by-product of the independence movement was the Nagorno-Karabakh separatist revolution.<sup>37</sup> The roots of tension in the Nagorno-Karabakh reach back to the 1920's. After the Soviets regained control of the Caucasus, they arbitrarily transferred the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave from Armenia to Azerbaijan. Some 131, 500 residents, 90% of which were ethnic Armenians, fell under Azerbaijani rule. Seventy years later, when the Soviet Union fell, this percentage had declined to 75% ethnic Armenians.<sup>38</sup> Nagorno-Karabakh is just one example of how the Caucasus is reverting to its ethnic divisions accompanied by bloodshed and ethnic cleansing. Nagorno-Karabakh's reintegration into Armenia has remained an Armenian priority since the late 1980's, with a majority firmly set against any resolution or agreement for returning to Azerbaijan. Despite Armenia's conflict with Azerbaijan, Armenians enjoy the best quality of life in the region. Roads are paved and have guardrails, commerce is thriving, and society is orderly, largely due to Soviet-style internal security measures. Armenia is the region's most stable nation because it's the least ethnically diverse of all the Caucasian countries.

Georgia, on the other hand, suffers the most of any Caucasian nation from ethnic division. The Soviet Union divided the Republic of Ossetia into North and South Ossetia with the dividing line along the crest of the Caucasus Mountains. The North Ossetians are still a Russian republic, while the South Ossetians are Georgian, and seeking reunification.<sup>39</sup> In 1992, after a year-long battle with Georgia, the Southern Ossetians signed a peace treaty and ceasefire with the government. The northwest Georgian province of Abkhazia broke away in an ethnic separatist struggle. In mid-1992, Georgian paramilitary forces entered the breakaway Abkhazian Autonomous Republic of Georgia, reigniting a new conflict that threatened to spread to the rest of Georgia. Georgian troops were driven out of Abkhazia in September of 1993. Georgia's

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pp. 126-129.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pg. 324.

<sup>39</sup> DA PAM 550-111, pg. 179.

humiliated President, Eduard Shevardnadze, was forced to request Russian military aid to prevent the collapse of the country. In mid-1994, Abkhazian forces controlled their entire republic and a cease fire was in effect. Finally, the UN provided a peacekeeping force, largely controlled and directed by the Russians—UNOMIG, the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia.<sup>40</sup>

Abkhazia is still independent as the Russians continue to exert influence unfairly over Georgia using the Abkhazian issue. Additionally, the Russians cancelled work visas for ethnic Georgians which cost the Georgian economy millions from the workers returned from Russia. However, Russia did not cancel visas for Abkhazian and Ossetian visas.<sup>41</sup> Georgia is now a patchwork of fiefdoms and city states, heavily dependent on Russia for energy. With Adjara or “Aslanistan” added to the mix, and rumblings of ethnic separatism in the southern province of Javakheti, Georgia’s ethnic secessions could rip their nation to shreds. Russia also continues to pursue Chechen rebels through Georgia’s Pankisi Gorge in what is termed “hot pursuit”, displacing civilians and creating refugee camps.<sup>42</sup> Georgia is the nation most delicately balanced on the edge of a civil war.

Azerbaijan has experienced ethnic strife as well. The country’s war with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh separated Nakhichevan, Azerbaijan’s westernmost republic, from the rest of the country and created nearly one million refugees. Nakhichevan has become a cartographic oddity. The region is a Muslim exclave that has produced the last three Azerbaijani Presidents with close commercial and cultural ties to Turkey and Iran. Nakhichevans must traverse the Armenian occupied Lachin corridor to visit Azerbaijan, fueling discontent with the lack of progress in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. Many Azerbaijani refugees have emigrated to Iran, joining the large Azeri Turk population centered around Tabriz. Of the world’s 20 million Azeri Turks, only 5.8 million reside in Azerbaijan. The bulk of Azeri Turks populate northwest

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<sup>40</sup> The background for the Abkhazian section was mostly harvested from a press release, #SC/6159 from the United Nations Security Council.

<sup>41</sup> “Hot Winter.” *The Economist*, 9 Dec 00, pg. 59.

<sup>42</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies. “Georgia Under Worst Pressure Since Independence”. *Georgia Update*. 10 Jan 01.

Iran, claiming Tabriz as their cultural capital.<sup>43</sup> There is diplomatic tension between Iran and Azerbaijan over the issue. Azerbaijan's most prominent poet, Bakhtiyar Vahabzada, expresses the essence of this tension when he writes:

We are oppressed by Russia and Iran...The Iranian people want us to lose our identity and speak Persian...There are twenty five million Azeris in Iran, where there is total repression of the Azeri culture. Iran favors Armenia, even though it is Christian, because the Iranians know that if the day comes when we Azeris are truly free, We will free all the Azeris in Iran.<sup>44</sup>

Ethnic struggle is igniting brush fires throughout the Caucasus, causing suffering and ethnic cleansing, displacing millions and creating widespread unrest. The Caucasus nations are not yet strong enough to control and mediate all the ethnic conflicts. In *Eastward to Tartary*, Kaplan notes that "the Balkans border Central Europe...the Caucasus has no such luck"<sup>45</sup>, and suggests that most Americans are unaware or unconcerned with the Caucasus' ethnic strife. The region's populace remembers NATO's recent intervention in Kosovo, as Caucasus ethnic cleansing goes unchallenged. The region struggles on the edge of western influence.

## RELIGION

Religion also lends a unique regional character to the Caucasus. Christianity dates back to the early Greek settlers of Georgia and was briefly curtailed by the Tartar-Mongol invasions who brought Islam to the region. Russian invasions reinvigorated regional Christianity in the nineteenth century, resulting in a diverse mix of religious groups.<sup>46</sup> Religion has played a major role in the conflicts of the Caucasus region. The Orthodox Armenians, the Georgians and the majority of the Ossetians were Christian, tied to the nearby Christian empires of Byzantium and Russia. The peoples of the North Caucasus and Azerbaijan were Muslim and received moral,

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<sup>43</sup> "Azerbaijan", Country Fact Sheet, [www.countrywatch.com](http://www.countrywatch.com).

<sup>44</sup> Kaplan, pg. 276.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, pg. 226.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, pg. 277.

economic, and military support from the Ottomans or Persia. Internal religious politics played a role as well. Georgians are traditionally more devout than the Ossetians, and the Azeris and Chechens more observant than the Dagestanis or Ingush. Religion is a factor in the ethnic Lezghian movement in northern Azerbaijan, and despite being predominantly Sunni, Turkey developed ties to Azerbaijan through a shared Muslim identity. In 1996, Turkey's Islamic Prime Minister, Necmettin Erbakan, made several overtures about Turkish-Azeri Islamic solidarity. He called for an "Islamic dinar" and the "liberation of Chechnya, Azerbaijan, and Bosnia", while intimating that Turkey could lead an "Islamic NATO" in the Caucasus region.<sup>47</sup> Political Islam has been a controversial and explosive issue in the region. Russia, western nations, and local governments are cautious and concerned with political Muslim leaders seizing power. They view other struggles like the Russo-Chechen war, the civil war in Tajikistan, and the rise of the Taliban's influence in Afghanistan as the threats posed by fundamental political Islamism. Other religious influences are more subtle and indoctrinated into the local societies. Orthodox Jewish settlements in Azerbaijan are numerous and illustrate peaceful coexistence. In the northern Azerbaijani city of Quba, people struggle with poor living conditions and a depressed economy. Across the river from Quba sits Krasnaja Sloboda, a smaller Orthodox Jewish community, where satellite television dishes adorn houses, new cars and commerce share the streets, and the living conditions are fairly hygienic and modern.<sup>48</sup> The issues are obvious issues—religious insularity in the Caucasus is a potentially destabilizing influence. Nationalist movements are justifying their rhetoric with religious tones and causes

## POWER

*"...NATO is strong—it's real power...dropping bombs on a city the size of Belgrade gave the West credibility. It was the kind of aggression that locals had seen often enough through their*

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<sup>47</sup> Tsepikalo, Valery V. "The Remaking of Eurasia", *Foreign Affairs*, 2, Vol 77, Mar/Apr 98, pg. 115.

<sup>48</sup> Interview, LTC(Ret.) Les Grau, Military Analyst, Foreign Military Studies Office conference room, concerning his trip to Azerbaijan in Jan 01, 24 Jan 01.



*history and could respect.”— Azeri veterans discussing power with Robert Kaplan, in Eastward to Tartary<sup>49</sup>*

*Our society is rotten, the Mafiosi are strong, and while the West worships laws, we worship power.”—Professor Levan Alexidze, Georgian intellectual<sup>50</sup>*

Power and who wields it is an age-old question in the Caucasus. Invaded and conquered by the world’s greatest civilizations—Byzantium, The Ottomans, Persia, the Mongols, and then Russia—the citizens of the Caucasus respect power as an absolute influence on their life and history. Diplomacy, information, and economics have influenced and maintained the tenuous peace of the Caucasus since independence in 1991. Understanding how regional leaders wield power to maintain stability is an important insight to intervention planning and decision-making.

## **Diplomatic Power**

Several entities wield diplomatic power in the region. First, there are ruling elites with powerful political and security networks inherited from the old Soviet empire. In Azerbaijan, suppression of dissidents and opposition parties is widespread. In March 1993, after defeating former President Elchibey, current President Heydar Aliyev combined former communists and adherents of minor parties into the New Azerbaijan Party, which became the ruling political party. Aliyev passed legislation that severely restricted the formation of opposition parties, and closed party membership to members of the judiciary, law enforcement, security, border defense, customs, taxation, finance, and state-run media so as to make them apolitical.<sup>51</sup> New political parties could not meet in government buildings or receive external foreign funding. Aliyev’s government increased harassment of opposition parties. The most recent demonstration of Aliyev’s political power was the rigged elections in October of 2000. He won amidst reports of distorted voting attendance figures and ballot stuffing.<sup>52</sup> Ironically, the elections followed on the

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<sup>49</sup> Kaplan, pg. 262. Emphasis added by author.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, pg. 236.

<sup>51</sup> WWW.countrywatch.com, Azerbaijan Information page, *Political Profile*, 2000, <<http://www.countrywatch.com>>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

heels of Azerbaijan's acceptance into the human-rights organization, the Council for Europe. This action demonstrates the influence Aliyev wields in international circles, leveraging the substantial Caspian oil reserves for diplomatic goals.<sup>53</sup> If the pinnacle of political power is to rule from beyond the grave, Aliyev may achieve it. He has arranged for his son, Ilham, to succeed him for the Presidency.<sup>54</sup> This action may prove more dangerous to Azerbaijan's stability than any other, since Ilham has publicly disagreed with his father's Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. In January this year, following a meeting with the French and Russian Presidents who chair the OSCE Minsk Group tasked to negotiate a Nagorno-Karabakh settlement, Ilham expressed his dissatisfaction over his father's exuberance with the progress. He stated that "Azerbaijan should be resolving this problem through a military way", and that he would not be satisfied until "the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan should be provided and all occupation forces should be removed from the occupied Azerbaijani grounds."<sup>55</sup> Ilham is also dissatisfied with pressure from Western nations for Azerbaijan and Armenia to reach an amiable agreement. He credits the West's greed for Azerbaijani oil rights as their motivation.<sup>56</sup> Ilham Aliyev's hawkish opinions do not contribute to long-term stability in the Caucasus. They contain the seeds of conflict that can pull the U.S. and other Western allies into a protracted intervention, especially since America has not withdrawn its pledge to contribute peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh if OSCE-Minsk succeeds.<sup>57</sup>

Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze also wields tremendous political power, but his motivation is survival. The former Soviet Foreign Minister has survived over nineteen attempts on his life, brokered deals in the West and with Russia for his country's fragile economy, and controlled the separatist republics by playing the warlords off each other. The source of Shevardnadze's skill is similar to Aliyev's—they were both members of the Soviet Union's

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<sup>53</sup> "What's Next?", *The Economist*, 11 Nov 00, pp. 62-3.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid; "Baba of Baku", *The Economist*, 9 Sep 99.

<sup>55</sup> Ashot Pivazyanyan, "Aliyev's Son Wants War with Armenia", [www.RussiaToday.com](http://www.RussiaToday.com), 13 Mar 01.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Clinton offered peacekeeping troops to monitor a ceasefire line in Nagorno Karabakh and \$2 billion in aid. "The Caucasus: Is Settlement Possible?", *The Economist*, 24-30 Jun 00, pg. 58.

ruling Politburo. Shevardnadze's was Gorbachev's Foreign Minister during *glasnost*, while Aliyev was a regional KGB chief and served as a full member of the Politburo.<sup>58</sup> Shevardnadze courts Russia and the U.S. with equal energy and maintains a delicate balance of coexistence with the breakaway regions within his country.<sup>59</sup> He also realizes that many pipeline agreements may seek to bypass Russia and pass through Georgia to the Black Sea, guaranteeing a stake in the Caspian oil-rush. The biggest future challenge facing Shevardnadze is the efforts to restore peace to Georgia and negotiate with its separatist republics.

Armenia's President Kocharian demonstrates comparable political dexterity. Whereas Georgia and Azerbaijan seek to minimize Russia's influence in their country, Armenia embraces both Russia and Iran as regional allies. Much of Armenia's economic and diplomatic success is credited to its lobby of émigrés in America. In 1996, Armenian-Americans conducted a telethon in Los Angeles to raise money for a modernized road to Nagorno-Karabakh, netting \$10.1 million.<sup>60</sup> They have lobbied successfully in the U.S. Congress against Azerbaijan's inclusion into the Freedom for Russian and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets (FREEDOM) Act. The FREEDOM Act, Section 907, prevents the U.S. giving Azerbaijan until it "takes steps to demonstrate steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh".<sup>61</sup> Diplomatically, Kocharian uses the provisions of Section 907 in the same way Aliyev uses Azerbaijan's oil reserves. He may continue to persuade Bush Administration. The newly selected Secretary of Energy, former Senator Spencer Abraham, is a staunch supporter of Armenia. He successfully prevented President Clinton's attempt to repeal Section 907 and Kocharian lauded his efforts to recognize the Armenian Genocide in 1915.<sup>62</sup> Kocharian demonstrates the guile and skill required to lead in the Caucasus, courting the U.S while

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<sup>58</sup> "Eduard Shevardnadze, Georgia's Foxy President", *The Economist*, 15 Jul 00, pg. 52; "Baba of Baku", *The Economist*, 9 Sep 99.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Kaplan, pg. 324.

<sup>61</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Azerbaijan Fact Sheet*, U.S. Department of State Dispatch, (Washington, DC: Superintendent of Documents, 2 May 1994), pg. 1.

<sup>62</sup> William O'Malley. "Will the New U.S. Administration Continue to Support Baku-Ceyhan?", (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 22 Jan 01), pg. 1.

embracing Russia and Iran. The next generation of national leaders in the Caucasus, in the wake of Shevardnadze, Aliyev, and Kocharian's may not be so adept at diplomatic maneuvering. They may resort to blunt, direct action with their militaries as Aliyev's son Ilham has threatened to do. Diplomatic power is a key factor in the stability of post-Soviet Caucasia, but up to this point, it has been wielded by experienced Soviet-era leaders with extensive backgrounds.

## **Information Dominance**

Political leaders in the Caucasus have manipulated information as a form of power to establish stability. The use of "perception management" by regional governments, for both internal and external information campaigns, has been refined to maintain control and censorship. Azerbaijan's Aliyev is a master at information manipulation. Reminiscent of Soviet-style media control, Azerbaijanis are fed a regular diet of governmental media programs and propaganda, including Aliyev's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration thanking him for his superb leadership.<sup>63</sup> The country named a mountain and a star after him, and his image is everywhere in Azerbaijan. On his birthday, he answered the question of whether he will accept of another term in office in 2003 by affirming "if the people want me to."<sup>64</sup> Aliyev masterfully uses wields information to dominate and repress dissident voices in Azerbaijan. Internationally, Aliyev's information campaigns are savvy as well. Despite confirmed reports of rigged elections, criticism of neglected human rights, and acknowledged media censorship, the Council of Europe offered Azerbaijan membership in January 2001.<sup>65</sup> The CFE is considered a prerequisite for European Union membership, which is one of Aliyev's stated goals. Kocharian received acceptance into the CFE for Armenia as well. The move may further the goals of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process, but it demonstrates Kocharian's information efforts internationally. Georgia's Shevardnadze also uses information to wield power. His negotiations with separatist republics in Georgia, his inclusion in the CFE and

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<sup>63</sup> Gavshon, *60 Minutes*.

<sup>64</sup> "Baba of Baku", *The Economist*, 9 Sep 99.

<sup>65</sup> O'Malley, William. "Azerbaijan Faces a Political Paradox", (Santa Monica: RAND, 23 Jan 01), pp. 1-2.

his proclaimed intentions to join NATO are prime examples. Shevardnadze uses his reputation as the Soviet Union's envoy during *glasnost* and *perestroika* as advantages in information campaigns. With the weakest military in the region, Shevardnadze uses the media to suppress the separatist movements' influence instead of employing overt force. One of his critical concerns is to project stability and security for oil companies building pipelines through Georgia. In March 1999, he appointed an interdepartmental commission to take "appropriate measures to ensure round-the-clock security of the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline."<sup>66</sup> He has also aggressively sought NATO membership, and a platform he used for reelection in 1999, the same year Georgia became a member of the Council of Europe, despite rumors that he rigged the elections.<sup>67</sup> Information manipulation is a critical component of Caucasian stability. The current politicians are masterful information specialists but future leaders may not be as effective, leading to destabilization in the Caucasus.

## **Economic Power**

Economic power is also a stabilizing force in the region. Hydrocarbons are the most important compound of future Caucasus prosperity. Gas and oil reserves in the Caspian raise issues such as pipeline routes, the legal status of the Caspian, and the real potential of the oil reserves.

The Caucasus was the site of the world's first "Black Gold" rush. Marco Polo alluded to a small 13<sup>th</sup> Century export trade in oil soaked sand.<sup>68</sup> Peter the Great sought to ship oil from the Caucasus north to Russia but was not successful until after Russian-Turkish War. Hitler tried to capture the region to sustain his war machine. In late 1942, under Plan Blue, he ordered an entire army group to seize the major oil distribution centers across the Caucasus and failed to reach

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<sup>66</sup> Shirin Akiner and others. *Russia and the CIS: Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Jan-Jun 2000*. Paul Burton, ed., (Surrey, England: Jane's Information Group Ltd., 2000), pg. 169.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, pg. 191.

<sup>68</sup> Khalil El-Saghir. *Caspian Sea Region: The Checkerboard of Oil & Minefields* Independent Political Science Study. (Dearborn: University of Michigan-Dearborn, Summer 1998), pg. 4.

Baku.<sup>69</sup> Caspian oil and gas even spawned a religion. The Zoroastrians worshipped the fires from fed by escaping natural gas. As it has for centuries, Caspian oil and gas is the key to Caucasus prosperity in the coming decade.



Figure 3. Pipelines in the Caucasus—Threading the Needle.<sup>70</sup>

Pipelines routed out of the region face an enormous challenge. Chechen and Muslim rebels have frequently interdicted pipelines running through Russia's war-torn northern Caucasus republics. Pipelines traveling north from the Caspian must extend hundreds of miles across Russia to make it to the Baltic coast. China is negotiating for a pipeline to travel west to be built by 2005.<sup>71</sup> If the U.S. can open discussions with Iran, pipelines can travel a short distance to the Persian Gulf, but U.S. firms are currently prohibited from those ventures. The Iranian routes make sense economically and industrially. The routes are short and the oil industry already uses

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, and SAMS curriculum, *Fall Blau* exercise.

<sup>70</sup> *The Economist*, 28 Oct 1999, pg. 54.

<sup>71</sup> *Jane's*, pg. 65.

the Persian Gulf for shipping. The U.S. once maintained close ties to Iran, and compromise may be attainable. Pipeline routing is the costly in a region teetering on the brink of conflict. Pipelines through Georgia face an uncertain future. The separatist republics can attack the pipelines if Georgia's government loses control and civil war erupts again. American companies need confidence to invest capital in the pipelines, as well as the other international consortiums. Caucasus stability is linked to pipeline politics. In 1999, the Clinton Administration tried to convince U.S. companies to build the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline from Azerbaijan through Georgia to Turkey's southern coast, but it was too expensive. Any move by the Bush administration to encourage the Baku-Ceyhan project is of vital importance to Caucasian leaders. As recently as the Presidential Inauguration in January 2001, analysts from the CATO institute and Carnegie Endowment advised the Bush administration to abandon the pipeline since shipping oil over the route from Baku to Ceyhan would not be commercially viable.<sup>72</sup> Other institutions support these claims. The Clinton Administration was using the Baku-Ceyhan project as a political tool without considering the economic realities. Thus, strengthened ties between Turkey, Georgia, the U.S., and Azerbaijan are now at risk if the U.S. withdraws its support for the pipeline.

A contentious issue is the legal status of the Caspian Sea. Is it a "sea" or a "lake"? If the Caspian is a "sea", national waters will extend two miles from shore. The open waters in the center are not national territory, nor are any oil platforms there. If it is a "lake", national waters will extend to the center giving each littoral nation a larger stake. During the Soviet era, Moscow held that the Caspian was a lake—an arrangement that gave the bulk of the Caspian to the USSR. Now Russia claims the Caspian is a sea—which would give Russia the ability to exploit the oil deposits in the center. Russia has renewed its claims since 2000.<sup>73</sup> In 2000, Russia signed an agreement with Kazakhstan over the legal status of the Caspian.<sup>74</sup> They continue to press the issue with Iran. After concluding an arms agreement in March of 2001, the two countries nearly

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<sup>72</sup> O'Malley, "Will the New U.S. Administration Continue to Support Baku-Ceyhan?", pg. 1.

agreed on the status of the Caspian littorals, but the agreement of all five littoral states—Azerbaijan, Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan—continues to elude the Russians. Russia's efforts demonstrate its renewed commitment in their leadership in the region. Russia is determined to send a clear message to the U.S. and other western nations that they will have their share of Caspian oil and gas.

Experts have yet to determine the actual value and extent of the Caspian's oil and gas reserves. A reliable projection will determine how much capital international investors will hazard. It could effect the West's commitment to the region as well. While current estimates vary, two international oil consortiums have withdrawn from the region over this issue. North Absheron Operating Company and PennzEnergy found insufficient reserves to continue operations.<sup>75</sup> Robert Ebel, an energy and national security expert at the Center of International Studies, has studied the region. His assessment is that "there's been a lot of media hype" about Caspian oil, but when it reaches full production, the region will not be strategically "pivotal, but it could be significant at the margin" of oil exports.<sup>76</sup> Most estimates rank the region at 200 billion barrels of oil valued at approximately \$4 trillion dollars, equal to the North Sea fields or about a third of Venezuela's vast holdings, America's biggest petroleum supplier.<sup>77</sup> Comparatively, the Caspian region is thirty-three times larger than Alaskan holdings and by itself, could provide the energy needs of the U.S. for the next thirty years.<sup>78</sup> Caspian reserves will not remove U.S. dependence on the Middle East or other sources, but will lessen dependence on other key regions. Finally, Chinese speculation in the region provides an opportunity for the U.S. diplomatically economically. The Chinese is emerging as one of the world's biggest oil customers. The U.S. should not be afraid of negotiating partnerships with Chinese oil companies and opening lines of communication to Beijing. The presence of a Chinese-American oil consortium could lessen

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<sup>73</sup> Cullen, pg. 20.

<sup>74</sup> "Russians Win Two, U.S. Loses One", Caucasuswatch.com, 13 March 2001.

<sup>75</sup> Jane's, pg. 58.

<sup>76</sup> Cullen, pg. 23.

<sup>77</sup> Grau, pg. 2.



tensions with China and provide a valuable ally to reduce tensions in the region, offsetting Russia and Iran's influences. Despite many debates, the region has not realized its full potential. Jane's Intelligence Review forecasts that the oil export figures could triple from thirty-four million tons of oil yearly in 2001 to 117 million tons by 2010, and even reach 178 million tons by 2020.<sup>79</sup> The question in 2001, therefore, is who will guarantee the Caucasus reaching its economic potential through Caspian oil and gas. The U.S., U.N., and NATO may find themselves involved with new strategic partners in the Caucasus to ensure oil and gas flows from the Caspian.

Diplomacy, information manipulation, and economics have generated both stability and tension in the Caucasus. Balancing the different types and directing them towards positive ends remains a challenge. An American force charged with stability in the region must understand how these characteristics comprise Caucasus culture and not be ignorant of their sources. Continual assessment of these factors by the U.S. military enhances the probability of planning for success if ordered to intervene in the region.

The complexities of the Caucasus constantly challenge its citizens, countries, and leaders. From a history of conflict and conquest emerged a patchwork of nationalities, religions, and cultures. These factors can impact a potential decision for U.S. intervention and shape the forces and missions required to achieve the strategic aim.

## **V. SECTION TWO: THE PROBABILITY OF INTERVENTION**

*"The upshot is that the pre-eminent victor [the United States and UN] of the cold war has failed to provide the leadership needed to build the kind of international system that the unruly post-cold war world demands."*—The Economist<sup>80</sup>

*"Is it in our self-interest to battle chaos and absolutism in the Near East? It is in the Balkans, because they are near Central Europe... Elsewhere, our interests depend on whether an overriding necessity is at stake. Otherwise, it is hard to imagine a Western government sending troops to, say, Syria, Georgia, or Azerbaijan were they to disintegrate. Only oil pumped in large*

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Jane's, pg. 64.

<sup>80</sup> "Engage and Prosper", *The Economist*, 5 Aug 00, pp. 22-23.

*quantities will represent enough of an interest for us to intervene.”—Robert Kaplan, Eastward to Tartary<sup>81</sup>*

Until superseded, the National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States provides the best tool to determine the probability of military intervention in the Caucasus. This section incorporates the complexities of the Caucasus described in the previous section and integrates them into an analysis of which threats and scenarios are likely to trigger a U.S. military intervention. The section begins with the U.S. policy towards the Caucasus region and follows by examining the “Decision to Employ Military Forces” section of the NSS to develop a profile of what key factors drive a decision for military intervention.<sup>82</sup> It then compares what Caucasus scenarios, events, or future conflicts would likely fit the profile created.

## **AMERICA’S CAUCASIAN POLICIES & STRATEGIES**

America’s policy towards the Caucasus is energy-centric. In the 1999 version of the National Security Strategy, President Clinton underscored his concerns about the future of the Caucasus region. He stated that America’s work as an arbiter of peace in the new millennium was not complete, noting that “American leadership will remain indispensable to further important national interests in the coming year,” and “securing new energy routes from the Caspian Sea that will allow newly independent states in the Caucasus to prosper”.<sup>83</sup> This statement reaffirmed Congress’ 1997 message declaring the Caucasus “a zone of vital American interests.”<sup>84</sup> Clinton’s special envoy for energy security to the region, Richard Morningstar, further outlined the thrust of American foreign policy in the region:

1. Independence, sovereignty, and welfare in these countries to be secured through the imposition of economic and political reforms.

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<sup>81</sup> Kaplan, pg. 329.

<sup>82</sup> NSS, pg. 20.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, pg. iv.

<sup>84</sup> Patrick Richter, “The Struggle for Caspian Oil: The crisis in Russia and the breakup of the Commonwealth of Independent States”, The World Socialist Web Site, (www.wsws.org, 1999), pg. 3.

2. Reducing the danger of regional conflict through the involvement of the states in international economic collaboration.
3. Strengthening the energy security of the USA and its allies with the help of the countries of the Caspian region.
4. Expanding opportunities for American corporations.<sup>85</sup>

Morningstar's 1997 comments fit into the 1999 version of the NSS, when it describes "Promoting Prosperity in Eurasia." The NSS states "we [the U.S.] are focusing particular attention on investment in Caspian energy resources and their export from the Caucasus region to world markets", noting that a "stable and prosperous Caucasus and Central Asia will facilitate rapid development and transport to international markets", but adding that it requires "substantial U.S. commercial participation."<sup>86</sup> The NSS further discusses a "shift away from reliance on Middle East oil", stating that "the Caspian Basin, with potential oil reserves of 160 billion barrels, promises to play an increasingly important role in meeting rising world energy demand."<sup>87</sup> The NSS corroborates a commitment to energy prosperity as the key to ensuring stability in the Caucasus. Nowhere did President Clinton or his ministers claim, however, that U.S. military intervention would be necessary to support American goals in the Caucasus. The messages were purely economic and diplomatic. This omission characterizes the U.S. concern about other factors that would limit military intervention in the region. Russian and Iranian presence, lack of sufficient military ground forces to create a credible presence, and inexperience in the region are among these concerns. Whatever the perceived risks, the economic and diplomatic instruments of power continues to be dominate U.S. policy in the Caucasus region in 2001.

In 2001, the Bush administration has concentrated on the Caucasus through the OSCE Nagorno-Karabakh peace process and energy concerns. The OSCE Minsk Group has been assisting negotiations in Nagorno-Karabakh since 1994. As recently as April of 2001, the Bush administration's Secretary of State, General (Retired) Colin Powell, brought the leaders of

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

Azerbaijan and Armenia to meet with President Bush to discuss a possible peace settlement and to promote the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline. The President and his Secretary of State were successful in scheduling both countries to meet in June of 2001 in order to discuss the issues of peace and oil/gas exploration.<sup>88</sup> With these April 2001 talks, the U.S. is reasserting its commitment to the region differently from Clinton's administration. Vice-President Cheney was a top executive in Halliburton Company, the world's largest oilfield services company and a company that bid for work on the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline.<sup>89</sup> Condoleeza Rice, President Bush's National Security Advisor (NSA), was on Chevron Oil's board of directors from 1991 until her appointment in 2001, and she has an oil tanker named after her in Chevron's fleet. Chevron is heavily involved in the Baku-Ceyhan process.<sup>90</sup> Other senior administration officials are tied to the oil industry in the region. If the administration successfully convinces the belligerents to settle peacefully, it may require a guarantee for U.S. military forces to observe and intervene between the forces in Nagorno-Karabakh. What criteria would decision-makers use to commit forces to the Caucasus?

## THE CRITERIA FOR DEPLOYING FORCES

The National Security Strategy's section on committing U.S. forces provides some basic guidelines for military employment. Under "The Decision to Deploy Military Forces" section, the leading factor is threat to an American *vital interest*. Vital interests are defined as "those of broad, overriding importance to the survival, safety, and vitality of our nation."<sup>91</sup> In the case that these are at stake, the NCA would theoretically have little dissent in deploying military force. One of the vital interests in the NSS is "energy critical infrastructure". The second type of interests that military forces would be deployed to protect are *important national interests*, which are described as "regions in which we have a sizable economic stake or commitments to our

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<sup>86</sup> NSS, pg. 33.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, pg. 24.

<sup>88</sup> "Bush Seeks to Help End Warfare in Oil-Rich Caspian", *Azerbaijan International Magazine*, ([azer.com/aiweb/categories/karabakh](http://azer.com/aiweb/categories/karabakh), 29 Apr 01).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

allies...and crises with a potential to generate substantial and highly destabilizing refugee flows.”<sup>92</sup> This type of national interest more closely fits the U.S. policy towards the Caucasus than it being a zone of vital interest. The last type of interest considered for military intervention is *humanitarian and other interests*, and provides a catch-all for any other unique missions and operations conducted by military forces.<sup>93</sup> The NSS presents the NCA with seven critical questions to shape the decision concerning military intervention:

1. Have we explored or exhausted non-military means that offer a reasonable chance of achieving our goals?
2. Is there a clearly defined, achievable mission?
3. What is the threat environment and what risks will our forces face?
4. What level of effort will be needed to achieve our goals?
5. What are the potential costs—human or financial—of the operation?
6. What are the opportunity costs in terms of maintaining our capability to respond to higher-priority contingencies?
7. Do we have milestones and a desired end state to guide a decision on terminating the mission?<sup>94</sup>

These seven questions can be condensed into seven key phrases: Economy of Force, Clear Mission, Threat & Risks, Effort, Costs, Priority, and Timeline. These phrases will represent the seven NSS questions while analyzing the Caucasus contingencies.

## **ANALYZING FUTURE CAUCASUS CONTINGENCIES**

The three most-likely regional contingencies that can trigger U.S. intervention in the Caucasus are: peacekeeping in the Nagorno-Karabakh, stabilization of a failed Georgia or Azerbaijan, and prevention of ethnic cleansing. Each of these possible contingencies will be described and analyzed using the seven key NSS phrases to determine the prospect of U.S. intervention in the Caucasus.

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<sup>91</sup> NSS, pg. 1.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.pgs. 1-2.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, pg. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, pg. 20.

## *NAGORNO-KARABAKH*

In April 2001, the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process received its most significant boost with through the efforts of President Bush. Peace talks scheduled for June 2001 between Azerbaijan and Armenia by the OSCE Minsk Group may forge an agreement and the question of a monitoring force could arise. The monitoring force would be an interpositionary force, separating the two belligerents in order to maintain the peace. Russia, the U.S., and France chair the peace process through the OSCE Minsk Group. If the monitoring force were representative of these nations, then the establishment of different national zones as in the Balkans might take place. Leadership of the multinational force in Nagorno-Karabakh would be an issue. The OSCE does have a well-staffed headquarters like NATO or the UN. A likely arrangement would be a rotational leader among the member nations or a leadership council chaired by a civilian commissioner. The Nagorno-Karabakh peace process has many opponents, with Heydar Aliyev's son, Ilham, being one of the most vocal. Ethnic Armenians in the region may not agree to resettlement of Azerbaijani refugees who were displaced nearly eight years ago. Overall, the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process has started up again with new vigor and sponsorship from the Bush administration, with uncertainty about the future contribution of the U.S. military from a decision.

**Economy of Force.** Can the U.S. contribute to the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process with another instrument of national power besides the military? **Assessment.** No. **Reason.** The U.S. military has credibility in the region. The regional leaders recognize the U.S. as a counter to Russia, and think that America can support a force over the long lines of communication into the Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenian support for U.S. military in Nagorno-Karabakh will likely be positive, and the U.S. would gain considerable credibility alongside Russian peacekeeping. Armenian pride and respect is at risk if the U.S. favors Azerbaijan, to include logistics basing solely around Baku. The U.S. must project an unwavering neutral position between the belligerents. The

Armenian lobby is extremely influential in the American government, and could influence the deployment. Re-settlement of refugees will require military assistance and will likely be the mission of longest duration.

**Mission.** What will the U.S. military mission key tasks be in a Nagorno-Karabakh interpositionary force? **Assessment.** Resettle the Azerbaijani refugees and enforce treaty provisions, followed by the conduct of a rotating peace-keeping operation. **Reason.** The Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh will initially resist all efforts to reabsorb the nearly one million Azerbaijani refugees. Negotiations must specify timelines, locations, and groups of refugee flow and resettlement. Troops must give ethnic Armenians and Azeris a period to negotiate which lands were former Azeri-owned. The military forces can not execute the mission without a robust logistics infrastructure. The force should consider other lines of support besides Georgian Black Sea ports. The Russians can provide high –speed and well-maintained roads into Azerbaijan and the closest capital city is Yerevan, Armenia. The network from Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh is the most developed. The local commander should possess authority to transition to combat operations if threatened, and be provided air support to extricate forces in contact. Overall, the peace treaty’s military clause should be simple and support the military force accomplishing its mission.

**Threat/Risk.** What threats and risks exist in the region? **Assessment.** Nationalist guerrillas could incite warfare between Azerbaijan and Armenia. **Reason.** The greatest threat to the military force will be ethnic Armenians in Armenia and in the Nagorno-Karabakh who wish to resist the peace effort. Azeris are less likely to resist or protest unless the resettlement fails. The peacekeepers must not embarrass the Armenian people or give them any additional motivation to resist resettlement operations. The treaty should provide decision points to aide U.S. military leaders with withdrawal criteria in case the treaty operations break down. Overall, given the modern U.S. military capabilities, the threats can be reduced significantly by advanced planning and a robust joint force structure.

**Effort.** What level of effort is required to support the peace process? **Assessment.** A multinational division-sized element, with a U.S. joint task force contingent: Ground mechanized brigade, Composite Air Force Squadron of attack, recon, and lift, Marine Expeditionary force to secure Black Sea LOCs, a Navy surface action group to secure sea lines of communication (no carriers allowed in the Black Sea under the Montrose Agreement), and a Special Forces task force to provide robust coalition support, deep reconnaissance, psychological operations, and civil military support. **Reason.** The U.S. will most likely participate in a multi-national division-sized element. The U.S. force must be capable of operating in a joint operations area that includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the sea/air lines of communication into the area, with potential to stretch into Russia for alternate lines of supply. The force should be capable of liaison with multiple nations. Lastly, the force should be mechanized for long-term survivability. Overall, the force may decrease after resettlement operations are complete and law enforcement agencies are able to contain problems. The weakest link in the force is the restrictive lines of communications into the region to supply to the force.

**Costs.** What potential human and financial costs exist? **Assessment.** Minor casualties from accidents and rioting. If serious threats to U.S. life occur, the force must be prepared to withdraw or adjust force protection posture. Financial costs are significant. **Reason.** The impact of casualties or mission failure for U.S. forces in peacekeeping operations is well documented. The U.S. peacekeeping forces will be in a high-risk environment. The likelihood of accidents will also be high due to the rugged terrain and underdeveloped infrastructure of the Caucasus. Host nation support is not robust and will require an infusion of capital to establish. OSCE funds will probably not be adequate to provide all the financial requirements. The costs to the U.S. will be considerable initially while the force moves to its positions and establishes lines of operation. Overall, the cost will likely be far more expensive than the Balkan operations have been.

**Priority.** What are the opportunity costs for this mission compared to others contingencies? **Assessment.** This force will be fully committed to this mission, and unable to



withdraw easily for employment in another theater. **Reason.** The force involved will be unable to deploy elsewhere unless substantial refitting and retraining occurs. The members of the joint team involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh operation will be tied down refugee resettlement missions and deterrence operations. Should U.S. forces also remain in the Balkans, the U.S. military will be hard-pressed to fight in two major theaters of war simultaneously.

**Timeline.** What timeline is likely to achieve the desired endstate in the Nagorno-Karabakh region? **Assessment.** An accurate estimating the potential timeline to reach the endstate in Nagorno-Karabakh is similar to that of the Balkans' timeline. **Reason.** Azerbaijan has a military that can operate alongside local law enforcement, however, assuring peaceful coexistence between ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis is difficult. The region is certainly Armenian, and arbitrary division during the 1920s eventually triggered the conflict. If peaceful division of the region does not include Armenian official representation a tension will exist. Therefore, the timeline must include agreed upon milestones by all parties. Resettlement disputes over land and property will likely be the longest to resolve.

**Overall assessment.** U.S. military intervention to conduct stability operations in Nagorno-Karabakh is likely, but costly. The current operations tempo for all services is strenuous, but if the Bush administration reduces forces in the Balkans, the military could absorb the additional burden of peacekeeping in the Caucasus. The operating costs in the Caucasus will be high. Host nation support would be limited. Force protection would be difficult and restrictive. Proximity to Iran might dictate additional agreements and negotiations to relieve pressures of possible retaliation to U.S. intervention. The most difficult consideration is command and control. If the peacekeeping effort is multinational following the OSCE Minsk group lines—Russian, U.S., and French—then who leads is decisive. Other nations may offer assistance—especially the United Kingdom, who has economic interests in the region. The force can not include Turkish

forces, because the Armenians claim they are guilty of genocide in 1915.<sup>95</sup> The Nagorno-Karabakh peace settlement might be occur bilaterally between Azerbaijan and Armenia, but it is highly unlikely with U.S. support.

### *STABILITY TO AZERBAIJANI OR GEORGIAN GOVERNMENTS*

The leaders of Azerbaijan and Georgia are Soviet-era leaders. Heydar Aliyev turns seventy-eight in 2001, and Eduard Shevardnadze is seventy-three.<sup>96</sup> In Azerbaijan, Aliyev has named his successor, his son Ilham.<sup>97</sup> Shevardnadze does not have a designated successor. Each one has survived numerous coups and assassination attempts using guile, brute force, and determination. They embody the political tenacity of Soviet-era bureaucrats supported by ruthless security services. The issue in each country is the aftermath of their deaths or retirements. Both leaders maintain their countries' stability in hopes of economic prosperity and greater independent action. Georgia is combating at least four separatist movements, and Azerbaijan has two. What effect will the succession of power through election or natural causes have on the timeline of these conflicts? Will they accelerate or diminish? U.S. decision-makers must contemplate the impacts and assess the abilities of the two countries to control any internal dissension. Will implosion within either Georgia or Azerbaijan affect the U.S, triggering the need for the intervention of a stabilizing force?

**Economy of Force.** Can Azerbaijan or Georgia stabilize internal dissension if either nation's government changes through democratic means, a coup, or natural causes? **Assessment.** Probably. **Reason.** The U.S. does not gain any political advantage by intervening in the Georgia or Azerbaijan. Although America has the ability to deploy large contingency forces, the force package necessary to stabilize either government is prohibitive. U.S. forces would certainly conduct non-combatant evacuation operations (NEO) as needed. Due to the repressive nature of

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<sup>95</sup> Kaplan, 276.

<sup>96</sup> Jane's, pp. 60 and 173.

each country's governments, the U.S. should expect some unrest during a handover of political control. However, the media and diplomatic instruments of power would be more effective than military, and less costly to U.S. military personnel. In the extreme case military force is necessary a combined Russian-U.S. coalition would be the most efficient and diplomatic method of acting.

**Mission.** What missions would U.S. forces likely execute to stabilize either government?  
**Assessment.** Non-combatant evacuation operations and possibly protection of U.S. economic interests and property. **Reason.** Internal conflict in Azerbaijan or Georgia would not require a Gulf War-like operation. The populations of each country would likely resolve the conflict internally. The likelihood of Russian intervention is considerable. The Russians have a history of intervention in Azerbaijan and forces based in Georgia. They would most likely intervene in a Georgian crisis over intervention in Azerbaijan, but they have a superior capability to respond to either country. U.S. forces would conduct a NEO followed by possible protection of U.S. interests and property in the region. Introduction of U.S. forces would require agreements with Russia, possibly cooperation. If U.S. policy makers attempted to counter Russian intervention with force, serious international implications would arise.

**Threat/Risk.** What threats and risks exist in the scenario? **Assessment.** Very high. Nationalist guerrillas, terrorists, and possible local conventional forces in a military coup; on a larger scale, conventional operations involving Iran or Russia. **Reason.** Distance and logistical requirements would be severely restrictive any U.S. military operation. Force projection of a survivable force to a failed state in the Caucasus is an extremely high-risk operation. Emerging capabilities from service transformation initiatives could provide the needed firepower, survivability, and sustainability, but the transformation organizations and equipment will not be operational for several years. Diplomatic initiatives would be more successful than military solutions. Overall, a NEO is a lower threat to U.S. forces and the primary concern in this type of contingency.

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<sup>97</sup> Pivazyanyan, pg. 12

**Effort.** What level of effort is required to stabilize a failing Georgia or Azerbaijan?  
**Assessment.** The requirement exceeds the capability of the U.S. military. **Reason.** The U.S. government will jeopardize its “two major theater of war” abilities if it attempts to stabilize a failed state in the Caucasus unless the attempt was multinational. This situation might draw the Russians and U.S. into operation bilaterally or multilaterally with other nations. OSCE, NATO or even the EU may attempt to collaborate with the CIS or Russia to save Georgia or Azerbaijan. Western economic investments in the region are sizable, and the oil companies have not recouped their capital investments. If the conflict attains worldwide media scrutiny, public opinion may demand a stop to such outcomes as ethnic cleansing or refugee problems.

**Costs.** What potential human and financial costs exist? **Assessment.** Moderate to heavy casualties if the military must engage separatist factions in either Georgia or Azerbaijan. There will be a large financial burden. **Reason.** The region has experienced conflict for many centuries. U.S. forces would contend with rugged terrain, extensive ethnic diversity, and several languages and dialects. Getting the force there, on time and intact, would be difficult. The use of routes from Iran or Russia would provide safer staging areas, but agreements and cooperation would take time to establish. The financial costs, even in a multinational operation, would be high. The failed states could not repay the U.S. or other nations unless the conflict was short and nearly bloodless. The likelihood of U.S. casualties would also be very high.

**Priority.** What are the opportunity costs for this mission compared to others contingencies? **Assessment.** This force will be consumed by this mission, and unable to extricate itself easily for a major theater war. **Reason.** This operation is not a priority military mission. If Azerbaijan or Georgia failed, the diplomatic relations may quickly resume as pro-American. The introduction of military forces could persuade the new government to be hostile to the U.S. Once a NEO is complete, military forces may be required to protect U.S. property but would likely withdraw until the crisis ended.

**Timeline.** How long will it take to stabilize a failed Georgia or Azerbaijan? **Assessment.**

The conflict would be long and may be unresolved when order is restored. Examples from Abkhazia, Ossetia, and other regional conflicts suggest a long period of adjustment after the new government stabilizes. **Reason.** The region has many on-going feuds and conflicts. The tensions could endure for a considerable period. Each nation possesses a substantial regional military. Whatever political party gains their support will achieve victory. The unrest and dissatisfaction with the new ruling government may be protracted, but the establishment of normal civil control would be quick. The addition of U.S. military forces may prolong the situation, and be counter-productive. It also may cause the political parties struggling for power to unite against the U.S. intervention, creating an even longer duration.

**Overall assessment.** U.S intervention to stabilize Azerbaijan or Georgia if they fail to prevent unrest during political handover is not feasible. The effect would create tension and add to the duration and cost of the operation. The passing of power from Heydar Aliyev or Eduard Shevardnadze through natural death, assassination, democratic process or coup will be a decisive event in the region. The long-standing relationships with the West and Russia will undergo change. Military intervention by the U.S. may have adverse effects on relations with the region. Despite this scenario being very probable, the plausibility of U.S. military forces deploying for it are unlikely.

### *ETHNIC CLEANSING*

The widespread ethnic diversity of the Caucasus creates tension. Ethnic cleansing in specific regions of the Caucasus occurred in the wake of the Soviet collapse, but went unnoticed by Americans. As U.S. interest in the region grows, will Americans tolerate large-scale ethnic cleansing in the Caucasus?

**Economy of Force.** Can any instrument of power other than the military prevent ethnic cleansing? **Assessment.** No. **Reason.** The region's ethnic populations have limited military or

national organizations. UNOMIG has contained the Georgian-Abkhazian problem in northwest Georgia. If another separatist republic threatens stability in the region, Azerbaijan or Georgia could request international assistance. At that point, the U.S. could provide substantial assistance to those governments. U.S. forces can contribute more than just combat forces. Logistics, medical, psychological, unconventional, aerial reconnaissance, and other type forces may be more effective and project a smaller profile. Ethnic cleansing could increase if a combat arms-centric force was deployed. An air campaign similar to Kosovo would not cease hostilities. Operations in Chechnya proved to the Russians that superior firepower was not the only answer. The ethnic cultures in the Caucasus who might engage in ethnic cleansing would likely demonstrate the same tenacity. Ground forces would be decisive to ending the hostilities, but at great cost.

**Mission.** What key tasks would the military accomplish? **Assessment.** Non-combatant evacuation operations and support operations to the government of the affected nation. **Reason.** The first priority task of the operation would be evacuation or ensuring the safety of U.S. civilians. The next step would be support to the national government to contain the problem. The U.S. can provide a credible deterrence to paramilitary and separatist forces. Medical aid and refugee support is also available through the military. The missions of U.S. forces in an ethnic cleansing requirement will invariably be driven by shortfalls of the requesting host nation.

**Threat/Risk.** What threats and risks exist in the scenario? **Assessment.** Low. Small-unit actions and anti-U.S. terrorism. **Reason.** The threat to U.S. forces charged with preventing ethnic cleansing is low but worth considering. As in Kosovo, the local population will protest the intrusion of an outside force and may conduct armed resistance or riots. Another risk is worldwide media campaigns against the U.S. intervention. Iran and Russia would likely protest an invitation by Azerbaijan or Georgia to the U.S. for aid. The U.S. force can mitigate most of the physical risks by employing an armored force at the cost of more deployment time. The U.S. can

mitigate the threat of anti-U.S. media campaigns by gaining U.N., OSCE, or other national agency approval before participating.

**Effort.** What level of effort is required to prevent ethnic cleansing? **Assessment.** A U.S. brigade acting unilaterally or bi-laterally with air support is a reasonable force package. If the action was in Georgia, a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) could be very effective from the Black Sea. Air forces will be required for logistics, reconnaissance, and close air support.

**Reason.** Preventing ethnic cleansing would require a joint force regardless of the location within the Caucasus. If the crisis was Adjara in southwest Georgia, around the port of Batumi, the force a Marine Corps brigade-size would be more effective than Army forces. Special operations units conducting precision strikes to neutralize belligerent leadership or command and control could be decisive. Since U.S. force should be in support of the requesting government, threat of U.S. involvement may be effective. The intervention or threat of U.S. forces in the Caucasus will have a larger effect than their size.

**Costs.** What potential human and financial costs exist? **Assessment.** Light casualties and low cost. **Reason.** Azerbaijan or Georgia can reduce the threat to U.S. forces by assuming responsibility for the more direct action themselves. Forces to secure U.S. interests, like a pipeline, may act first followed by assistance to the requesting nation. Therefore, the role of the peacekeepers is not direct confrontation, but an economy of force role supporting the national forces as they act against the ethnic cleansing.

**Priority.** What are the opportunity costs for this mission compared to others contingencies? **Assessment.** This force is available on short notice for other missions worldwide. **Reason.** The military can accomplish this mission with various forces depending on the requirement. If more serious operations erupt somewhere else in the world, the force could quickly react to a different mission, especially if the force is supporting the local government. The location and intensity of the ethnic cleansing will determine time that the mission will take.

**Timeline.** How long will it take to stop ethnic cleansing in the Caucasus? **Assessment.** Indeterminable. **Reason.** Once U.S. forces are introduced into theater, the likelihood of a protracted conflict diminishes. Given enough lead time and a robust transportation plan, the U.S. forces could deploy rapidly and quickly support the requesting government. The threat of U.S. firepower will likely produce a quicker ceasefire and initiate negotiations between the government and the ethnic party involved. This mission is a short duration and low intensity operation, depending on the location and means being employed.

**Overall assessment.** Ethnic cleansing can be brutal and vehement. The governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia have ongoing ethnic conflicts within their borders continuously. Ethnic conflict in the Caucasus can quickly overwhelm the capability of the national military and law enforcement organizations to cope with the situation. The result can be a request for assistance to nations like the U.S. who can respond in a variety of ways. This type of mission must be short, discreet, and have specific tasks, but within the capabilities of the U.S. military.

## **AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN THE NEAR FUTURE**

The three scenarios discussed in this section explore very possible contingencies for American forces in the Caucasus. The Caucasus is a violent region searching for stability. In his book *Eastward to Tartary*, Robert Kaplan's summary of the region is that its struggling to remove its third world image and advance technologically and socially. However, forces within the region make the transition arduous and sometimes violent. The growing U.S. interests in the region and renewed focus by the Bush Administration may increase America's awareness on the Caucasus, and reinvigorate Western investment. However, situations may require the military to protect U.S. interests, reinforce new alliances in the region, enforce peace treaties, or prevent the collapse of the region's governments.



## **VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: THE ROLE OF U.S. MILITARY IN THE CAUCASUS**

*“After Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda, few people any longer imagine it would be easy to import any sort of world order, even if the might United States or the unmighty United Nations should wish to. Yet, idealism is not quite dead. As Augusto Pinochet knows, the world is not altogether safe for dictators, warlords, and ethnic-cleansers, and the concept of humanitarian intervention is now indelibly on the international agenda”.—The Economist<sup>98</sup>*

*“Yusuf was disappointed in the Americans...In this new chaotic Somalia, the shifting alliances and feuds of the clans and subclans were like the patterns wind carved in the sand...And yet these Americans with their helicopters and laser-guided weapons and shock-troop Rangers were going to somehow sort it out in a few weeks? They were trying to take down a clan, the most ancient and efficient social organization known to man...Setbacks just strengthened the clan’s resolve.”—Mark Bowden, Blackhawk Down<sup>99</sup>*

The American military will intervene in the Caucasus before 2010. The growing significance of the region is drawing American policy makers closer to a decision. Turbulence and tumult in the region threaten to explode into another conflict. The American interests in the Caucasus will need protection. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, American oil speculation seized the initiative in the region. Diplomatic ties improved when the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia joined international organizations and alliances, like Partnership for Peace and the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe. Gradually, the average American will be more aware of the region. However, America’s relationship with the Caucasus has a long way to go before its commitment rivals its relationships with other regions, like Western Europe.

The role of the U.S. military in the Caucasus is developing. NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) is a start, building bonds of cooperation through multilateral exercises. The U.S. military has addressed the challenges it faces in the region through strategic level exercises.<sup>100</sup> However, the focus remains on the contingencies in Southwest Asia and Korea, despite the fact that the Caucasus is growing in strategic importance. It may not rival the significance of

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<sup>98</sup> “Engage and Prosper”, pg. 22.

<sup>99</sup> Mark Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999), pg. 75. Emphasis added by author.

<sup>100</sup> Author’s discussions with TRADOC Analysis Command at Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1 Feb 01.

preparing to fight in two major theaters of war simultaneously, but the probability of conflict in the Caucasus is fairly high. Understanding the complexity of the Caucasus is the first and most critical step U.S. military planners can take.

Several additional areas of research on the subject remain. A logistical analysis can determine how well the infrastructure of ports, airfields, and roads in the Caucasus can support the movement of forces and equipment. A social analysis of what type of democracy the U.S. could expect to emerge alongside Islam in Azerbaijan would support conflict termination themes. A research paper about Russian intentions in the Caucasus and how they might destabilize the countries of Georgia or Azerbaijan would be insightful. Finally, research into China's emerging role into the region and whether it can be a strategic partner in future operations could provide inroads to lessen the tension between the U.S. and China.

The Caucasus is a wild and foreign place to Americans. The names and locations in the Caucasus are less familiar than those in Europe or South America. The U.S. regional strategy has been driven by an energy security policy and will continue to grow more important with economic investment. The U.S. military may play a larger role in the region's stability as they become strategic partners.

## APPENDIX 1—HANDY REFERENCE TABLE FOR CAUCASIAN CONFLICTS

Reference: “The Caucasus: Where Worlds Collide”, *The Economist*, 19 Aug 00, pg. 18.

Such a lovely place			
Where	What	Neighbours' view	What they say back
Abkhazia	Unrecognised separatist republic	Murderous, idiotic Russian stooges	Georgian imperialists tried to destroy us and our culture
Ajaria	Autonomous republic within Georgia	Got rich by stealing customs revenues	Rest of Georgia is wild, badly run
Armenia	Independent country	Arrogant, untrustworthy Russian stooges	Genocidal maniacs (Turkey, Azerbaijan)
Azerbaijan	Independent country	Primitive, murderous, American lackeys	Russian-backed aggressors (Armenia)
Georgia	Independent country	Wild, corrupt, horrid to minorities	Russian-backed separatist stooges
Javakheti	Armenian part of Georgia	Disloyal, potential separatists	Georgia neglects us
Nagorno-Karabakh	Self-proclaimed republic	Illegal Armenian aggressor puppet state	Refuge from homicidal neighbours
Nakhichevan	Exclave of Azerbaijan	Autocratic, primitive	Our guys run the whole country
Pankisi Gorge	Chechen-populated part of Georgia	Wild	Wimpy
South Ossetia	Unrecognised separatist republic	Murderous, ungrateful, recent immigrants, Russian stooges	Georgian imperialists terrorised us

  

Where	Main ally	Mafia involvement	Do-gooders	Importance
Abkhazia	Russia	Lightly supervised port offers great potential	UN (monitors Russian-led peacekeepers)	Blocks railway to Russia, 200,000 angry refugees in Georgia
Ajaria	Russia, probably	Russian mobsters have been spotted there	—	Ignores Georgian government. Russian base
Armenia	Russia (guns), America (money) Iran (trade)	War profiteers, corrupt officials	OSCE	Large Russian military presence
Azerbaijan	America, Turkey	Ruling elite very corrupt	OSCE	Oil, gas. Helps Chechnya, says Russia
Georgia	America	Rampant cronyism at all levels	UN, OSCE	Could disintegrate or implode violently
Javakheti	Armenia, Russia	Very poor	—	Potential flashpoint. Large Russian base
Nagorno-Karabakh	Armenia, Russia indirectly	War profiteers, veterans' groups	OSCE would like to be	Cause of the largest conflict in the region
Nakhichevan	Azerbaijan, Turkey	Officialdom does conspicuously well	—	Birthplace of Azerbaijan's president. Border with Turkey
Pankisi Gorge	Chechnya	Don't ask	UNHCR, ICRC	Russia complains Chechen fighters shelter there
South Ossetia	Russia, North Ossetia	Tunnel to Russia offers huge potential	OSCE (monitors Russian-led peacekeepers), UNHCR	Blocks road route to Russia

Source: *The Economist*

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